

Fighting Poverty with Facts

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Progress relies on sound information in the Philippines

In the Philippines, the community-based monitoring system has gone from pilot project to national scale in 14 years, with the strong support of all levels of government. The many uses for the information it provides include program planning and targeting as well as budget allocation. The system is also being used to monitor how well the Philippines is achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Progress in Pasay City, Metro Manila, is occurring by acronyms. Rolando A. Londonio, City Cooperatives Officer, explains how improving life and prospects for the city's numerous out-of-school youth is based on HOPES — **H**IV prevention, **O**utsourceing livelihood skills, **P**lacement of jobs, **E**ducation through alternative learning systems, and **S**ports, arts, and culture.

For families, there are SMILES — **S**helter and health are addressed, **M**alnutrition is addressed, **I**dentify is secure, **L**oved, cared for and protected, **E**ducated and empowered, **S**avings generated. SMILES are targets to reach to reduce poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Says Londonio: "The main objective is to put smiles and maintain smiles on children's faces. Smiles are indicators of progress."

Families requiring assistance are FISH (**F**amilies **I**n the **S**lums who need **H**elp). There are also FOWLS — **F**amilies of **O**verseas **W**orkers **L**iving **S**acrificially.



Rolando A. Londonio

And then there is the CBMS, the community-based monitoring system adopted by Mayor Wenceslao "Peewee" B. Trinidad and first implemented in 2004 by City Planner and Development Coordinator Engineer Merlilta Lagmay. The system, says Londonio,



Jonathan Igharas

The Pasay City government is determined to reduce poverty, a fact of life for too many residents.

provided the foundation for these and other programs. Carried out city-wide in 2005, the first survey disclosed "some alarming facts." For instance, it revealed an unemployment rate of 19.8%; that 8000 of the city's 6- to 12-year-olds were not in elementary school; and that 5000 youths were not in high school.

"Why did this happen?" asks Norie Alvarado of the City Planning and Development Office. Education is a government priority: schooling is free and there are schools near the households, she says. But it appears that many families cannot afford school supplies and uniforms.

About CBMS

The Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) is an organized way of collecting, analyzing, and verifying information at the local level to be used by local governments, national government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and civil society for planning, budgeting, and implementing local development programs. It also serves to monitor and evaluate their performance. Piloted in the Philippines in 1994, it is now being implemented in 14 countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

A focus on the family

A congested, noisy city of some 400 000 residents within metropolitan Manila, Pasay City aims to become “a scenic premier city, thriving with business and economic opportunities, guided by dynamic and efficient local leadership, and a home to self-reliant, morally upright people,” a vision posted on the city’s website.

This is easier said than done. Today, Pasay suffers from overcrowding, unemployment, and poverty — 41% of the city’s households live below the poverty line. But the city is determined to succeed and is focusing its efforts on reducing poverty while improving education, health, and the environment. Central to these efforts is realizing the MDGs, one family at a time.

In 2005, the Pasay City government set out to harness the potential of the city’s families to fight poverty. Together with the Brotherhood of Christian Ministers of Pasay, and in partnership with UN-HABITAT and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the city embarked on an initiative to “localize” the MDGs in every family — to make individual families advocates, promoters, and achievers of the goals.

To do so, each of the eight goals was translated into simple “can do” statements (see box, *Localizing the MDGs*): 80 000 families have since signed the Family MDG Pledge of Commitment.

Localizing the MDGs

The CBMS census supported the city’s efforts by providing data on the living conditions of each household in every *barangay*, as well as vital information about their needs and priorities. This enabled the city to launch appropriate programs.

LOCALIZING THE MDGs

Millennium Development Goal	Pasay’s Family Goal
Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.	My family has a job and savings.
Achieve universal primary education.	All our children go to school.
Promote gender equality and empower women.	Men and women have equal rights.
Reduce child mortality.	All our children are healthy.
Improve maternal health.	We keep pregnancy safe and healthy.
Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.	We avoid HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.
Ensure environmental sustainability.	We keep our homes and the environment clean.
Develop a global partnership for development.	We get involved in community development.

For example, when it was learned that residents often spent scarce resources to travel to City Hall to queue for job placements and referrals — with little chance of success — the municipal government, in partnership with the business sector, decided to organize job fairs in *barangays*, where applicants could be interviewed and hired on the spot: the Public Employment Service Office hiring rate increased to 62%. A skills enhancement program was developed in partnership with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority to upgrade the skills of those who were not hired.

And as Londonio points out, the CBMS informed a city ordinance that requires all companies within the city limits to hire 60% of their workforce from Pasay City.

When the data showed that there were 114 dependents of overseas workers in one of the city’s 201 *barangays*, a savings group was organized (OFW Bayanihan Savings Group), and a mini-mart established to both employ and serve them.

The Bayanihan Banking Program (BBP) itself is part of the city’s poverty reduction efforts. It draws on the Filipino tradition of *bayanihan* or mutual aid, to encourage a pooled savings scheme among the urban poor. It also provides affordable financial services, linked to cooperatives and national programs that provide training for livelihood projects. So successful is the project that it is now being replicated across the country.



Among the tools implemented to overcome unemployment: job fairs and skills enhancement programs.

"These are all products of CBMS," says Londonio. "We could not do this without baseline data."

In recognition of these efforts, Pasay was selected by the UNDP and the Galing Pook Foundation as one of the 2006 winners of the Gawad Galing Pook award. These awards recognize innovation and excellence in local governance.

National support and promotion



The Hon. Domingo Panganiban (at left), Lead convenor and Secretary-General of the National Anti-Poverty Commission, speaks highly of Pasay's experience and success and of the CBMS.

"When I came to this department," he says, I felt we

needed to muster all our resources to address the poverty problem. I talked with the governors, with the mayors, to report to us directly on how we can contain poverty and hunger at the local level. No one could answer except to say, 'in my province sanitation is my priority,' 'in my province, livelihoods is my priority.' But what kind of livelihood project are we talking about? Is it a short-term project or a long-term project that will mobilize every level of government? There was no coordination, and there was miscoordination."

The CBMS, which he first encountered in 2003, provided a solution.

Panganiban sees many uses for the data. One is better targeting of the assistance provided to the poor through programs such as health cards and rice access cards. In one area, he says, the CBMS data showed that only 1200 households should be entitled to free PhilHealth cards — free health care services — not the 3000 who had received them.

Training is also crucial. "The data will tell us how many are out of school, their ages, how many are male, how many are females. When we know, our people can go and start interviewing numbers of possible trainees." He cites a recent program through which "we graduated 300 in one of the poorest areas in reflexology, costume jewellery making, and cellphone repair."

In March 2009, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) announced a new program — the Local Economic Assistance Program — to support poverty-reduction projects grounded in CBMS data and prioritized by the community. The goal: reduce the impact of the global financial crisis on local economies. The program also supports CBMS implementation in communities where the system has not yet made inroads. This new initiative is an expansion of the CBMS–UNDP Development Grant Program, launched in 2005 to provide funds for local government and NGO interventions that address development needs identified through CBMS surveys.

Panganiban is one of CBMS' strongest advocates. As he notes, "the Philippine government has been very supportive of this initiative." For instance, the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan 2004–2010 targets the expansion of CBMS coverage to all local government units by 2010. Key national government agencies — including the National Economic and Development Authority, the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC), the DILG, and the League of Municipalities of the Philippines — have supported the use of CBMS as a monitoring tool to both diagnose poverty at the local level and localize the MDGs. NAPC and the DILG fund training of local teams in CBMS methodology and analysis.

Toward national implementation

The spread of CBMS through the Philippines and its acceptance at all levels of government are remarkable given the system's modest beginnings in 1994. From pilot testing in two *barangays* in the province of Bulacan to uptake in the province of Palawan in 1999, by January 2009 it was being implemented in 52 provinces (26 implement it province-wide), 531 municipalities, and 42 cities — a total of 13 498 *barangays*. The goal is national coverage by 2010.

Under the direction of Celia Reyes, CBMS Network Coordinator, and with support from Canada's International Development Research Centre, the network team based at the Angelo King Institute for Economic and Business Studies of De La Salle University (Manila) has been guiding this replication and adaptation. The costs of implementation have been largely borne by local governments, a clear indication that they see the value of the system. For example, says Manuel Gotis, Director of the Bureau of Local Government Development at DILG, the governors

of Negros Oriental and of Tarlac provinces recently each allocated 6 million pesos to implement CBMS province-wide. Zamboanga City allocated 2 million.

Other stakeholders and donor agencies — including UNDP, UN-HABITAT, the UN Population Fund, and the World Bank — have contributed to CBMS implementation and to ensuing projects, which bodes well for sustainability. Civil society organizations have also adopted CBMS. Social Watch Philippines (SWP), for instance, has integrated the system in its own monitoring of MDG achievement and for “taking the government to task,” says Rene Raya, SWP’s Program Development Coordinator.

As it has grown, CBMS in the Philippines has adapted to local circumstances and particular uses, by adding indicators specific to communities for instance. Using CBMS to monitor and localize the MDGs itself required adding an indicator on maternal health.

The data is useful at more than the local level. Fed into a computerized national repository system, installed at the National Anti-Poverty Commission and the League of Municipalities of the Philippines, it is available to governments and researchers.

Still leading in new CBMS applications, the Philippines CBMS team is now testing its use in gender-responsive budgeting. A pilot project in Escalante City confirmed the usefulness of CBMS, which had been modified to capture additional gender-relevant information, such as education and livelihood skills, in targeting and resource allocation. For example, the city’s rather indiscriminate use of the gender and development budget was stopped and the funds were redirected to programs that responded to the CBMS findings — a supplemental school feeding program, maternal and child care, and free hospitalization at local government hospitals, among other measures.

In this way, and in others, “CBMS is good politics,” says DILG’s Manuel Gotis.

This case study was written by Michelle Hibler, senior writer at IDRC.

The views expressed in this case study are those of IDRC-funded researchers and of experts in the field.

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June 2009

CASE-POVERTY-3E



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